

ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN

St Andrew's Church,

ON

SUNDAY, 12TH APRIL, 1818,

ON OCCASION OF INTIMATING

COLLECTION

FOR

THE ROYAL INFIRMARY

OF

Edinburgh.

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EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY J. HAY & CO.

NIDDRY STREET.

1818.

44110/P

Some of the FRIENDS of the ROYAL INFIRMARY, who heard the following Address delivered, were pleased to think that its wider circulation might be useful to the Institution. The author did not think himself warranted to refuse to allow it to be printed, when requested to do so on this ground.



ADDRESS, &c.

THE numerous evils under which a considerable portion of mankind must always labour, make it necessary to call upon you frequently for extraordinary exertions of charity. But there can be no claim on your benevolence stronger than that which has now been stated in behalf of the Royal Infirmary : For no institution can better deserve the support of a generous public, than that which has for its object the relief of the poor under the various diseases and accidents to which they are liable.

The common evils of indigence admit of being removed or alleviated by ordinary exertions of charity ; and such is the prevalence of this most useful virtue, that these evils seldom occur without producing the necessary endeavour to mitigate or relieve them. But to provide medical aid, in circumstances the most favourable for the relief of the poor who need it,—to procure for them the necessary attendance during tedious sufferings, together with the most skilful treat-

ment in dangerous accidents and diseases, and the diet and regimen most conducive to their recovery,—these are effects to which individual charity is inadequate; because, in the situation of a great proportion of the labouring poor, these are advantages which money can hardly purchase.

The houses of the lower classes of the community are, in general, very ill adapted to the comfort and recovery of the sick. Many of the poor who may need the most assiduous attendance, have no friends to give it; and those who may be interested in their behalf, sometimes do more harm by their ignorance, than good by their kindness. The straitened circumstances of the labouring classes put it out of their power to obtain the nourishment necessary in certain diseases; they must content themselves with the diet and regimen which they can afford. And not unfrequently, a sense of shame prevents them from applying for proper medical assistance for which they find themselves unable to give any remuneration. Whoever duly considers these inconveniences to which the sick poor are liable,—inconveniences which private donations, and individual charity cannot effectually remove,—will acknowledge, that there can be no charity in which the

heart of a benevolent man will more fully concur, than in that which provides, by a judicious public establishment, for obviating these evils of sickness and indigence.

View the subject in another light. Some diseases are contagious ; and the confined dwellings of the poor, together with the inattention to cleanliness, which is in some degree unavoidable in their situation, are found to give such virulence to contagion, that when a disease of this kind attacks one of a family in the lower ranks, it commonly enough goes through them all ; and, not unfrequently too, it is propagated by means of the intercourse of neighbours, so as to become general in a city or district. It must therefore be a matter of the utmost consequence to the general safety, to have the poor, who are attacked with such diseases, removed without delay, from their own confined houses, to a place properly accommodated for their reception ; where they may receive the most skilful medical assistance, and every comfort which their situation requires ; and where such precautions may be employed as have been found by experience most effectual for preventing the spreading of the contagion. By these means the patient obtains the best chance of recovery ; his family is saved from the imminent

danger to which they would otherwise be exposed ; and probably, also, an infection may be prevented from spreading, which might have proved fatal to multitudes.

Who can tell how far the fever, which has for some time prevailed in this city, might have extended its ravages, had not such precautions been employed to check its progress ? We know that the measures which have been employed are the most judicious that have yet been discovered for arresting the progress of infection : and in this place the disease has been less prevalent than in other places where no such preventive means could be adopted. We may therefore presume, that the comparative unfrequency of the disease has been owing, at least in some degree, to these measures of precaution.

When you reflect on the complicated distress which a dangerous epidemic unavoidably produces,—how many an affectionate heart it wounds with an anguish which admits of no mitigation,—and how many of the young, and the aged, and the helpless, it deprives of their guide and stay, and throws from their peaceful and contented dwellings into friendless poverty and affliction,—you must be convinced that there can be no other object more important, or more worthy to call

forth the exertions of benevolence, than checking the beginnings of such terrible evils. And you must be convinced also, that the establishment, which is calculated for this most important object, has a claim on your liberality, more peculiar than any ordinary charity ;—a claim, not resulting only from the advantages which it conveys to the poor, or to strangers, but also from the security which it may afford to yourself, and those in whom you feel the tenderest interest.

There is another view in which the Royal Infirmary has a peculiar claim on you. Your servants are liable to sickness and accidents. They may be seized with contagious diseases, when it would be unsafe to accommodate them in your own houses ; and, independently of any idea of danger, you may not have accommodation for them to spare. Now, though I do not say that you are bound by any legal enactment to provide for them in these circumstances, yet it may be presumed, that there is an obligation superior to all human law in the compassion of your own heart, and your sense of accountability to the Supreme Lord, of whom we are all equally servants, which would not suffer you to entertain the thought of dismissing a faithful domestic under the pressure of disease, without seeing him pro-

perly taken care of; and if we had not the institution for which I plead, this duty to your dependents you might often find it very difficult to discharge.

But the Royal Infirmary is open to receive them in every serious disorder where human skill can avail; and in sending them to it you commit them to the charge of men of integrity and experience, who will do every thing for them that medical skill can accomplish; and you know that they will be suffered to want for nothing which is proper for persons in their situation. It is therefore an act of justice, as well as of benevolence, to contribute, according to your ability, for the support of an institution which enables you to discharge, with ease to yourself, an important obligation which you may sometimes owe to your dependents.

There is still another important advantage resulting to society at large from this Institution, which deserves your attention. It is well known that medical skill cannot be acquired by mere study, and without actual experience. To constitute a skilful practitioner, there must be a practical acquaintance with the symptoms, progress, and termination of disease; a facility, which can be acquired only by use, of applying to the pecu-

liar circumstances of the cases that may occur in practice, the theoretical knowledge which is gained by study. The Royal Infirmary affords to the numerous students of medicine in this University, an opportunity of acquiring this necessary experience of the various disorders of the human frame, and of the most approved mode of treatment in each.

This is an advantage of which the rich and the poor equally participate. In consequence of the experience which they acquire in attending the Royal Infirmary, those to whom you must commit yourselves in all the disorders to which you may be liable, come to the practice of their profession more worthy of being relied on in every critical case, and better qualified to discharge successfully the many delicate duties which the medical profession implies.

Of the management of this valuable establishment I need say nothing. Its Managers are well known to be inferior to no other individuals in the community in the qualities that entitle men to public confidence. It has lately undergone a scrutiny, conducted with sufficient accuracy and minuteness to bring hidden abuses to light, if any such existed; and the opinion of the public as to the result of this investigation has been pro-

nounced with sufficient clearness. Indeed, the well known fact that there are fewer fatal cases in this Hospital in proportion to the number of Patients, than in any other of the same description in Britain, is of itself decisive proof, that nothing exists which affects the general usefulness of the Establishment.

Considering then the various important and extensive advantages, which result, not only to the sick poor, but to society at large from the Royal Infirmary, every impartial person must admit, that it has a very peculiar claim to public support. It may safely be affirmed, that in contributing to enable the Managers to accomplish more fully the benevolent purposes of the institution, you do more real good to the community than by almost any sum whatever bestowed in casual charity. For you have the assurance, that what you bestow, will be faithfully and judiciously applied to the immediate relief of the most pressing evils of suffering humanity; and that, indirectly, it will contribute to check the prevalence of contagious diseases, and to promote that advancement of medical skill which may remove or alleviate the sufferings of multitudes of your fellow creatures, both in the present, and in future generations.

I have only to suggest farther, that those who may not be able to come to Church next Lord's day, may send their contribution by some of their friends ; and let no persons be prevented from contributing what they think proper, by the consideration that they can afford to give but little. Remember that, in the estimation of Him that judgeth righteously, the widow's mite was more precious than all the costly offerings of the rich.

